

CALAMITIES – A DHARMA PROBLEM?*

The question mark in the title of my paper is due to the fact that there are no calamity lists in *dharmasūtras* and *dharmaśāstras*, but there are several different lists in political and other texts. Yet I am convinced that calamities caused by providence (*daiva*) are as well a *dharma* as an *artha* problem. There are three or possibly four different lists in the Kauṭīliya *Arthaśāstra*.

In the IVth book we find the chapter *upanipātapratikāra* (remedies against catastrophies) which starts IV.3,1: *daivāny aṣṭau mahābhayāni - agnir udakaṃ vyādhir durbhikṣaṃ mūṣikā vyālāḥ śarpā rakṣāṃsīti* (fire, foods, floods, disease, famine, rats, wild, beasts, snakes, demons are the eight great troubles caused by providence). In IV. 3. 2 we read that he (the king) should protect the country from these (*tebhyo janapadaṃ rakṣet*). One by one remedies against these eight *upanipātas* are enumerated: against fire-fighting implements must be provided; in the rainy season, rafts etc. must be available; famine is remedied by food-stuffs stored before or by migration to another region - which indicates a small kingdom, not an empire of Mauryan dimensions. Rats are killed by cats and mongoose; poisoned carcasses and traps are remedies

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against wild animals, or hunters may kill them with their arms; diseases and snake-bites are cured by physicians. Besides such practical counter-measures religious rites are advocated in all cases: offerings, incantations, prayers. Clearly, against demons there are only religious ceremonies, but in the case of drought (where we might expect the recommendation to build tanks and reservoirs) there are no other remedies than rites. In this latter case Indra, the Ganges, mountains and Mahākaccha (the ocean?) should be worshipped. Religious ceremonies against calamities should be performed by holy ascetics (*siddhatāpasāḥ*), magicians (*māyāyogavidāḥ*) experts in the Atharvaveda (*atharvavedavidāḥ*). The *purohita* is not mentioned in the context of this calamity list (and the others in the Kauṭaliya Arthaśāstra), but in Kauṭ I, 9, 9, (see Below).

Kauṭ IV, 3, 44 has the concluding stanza:

*māyāyogavidas tasmād viṣaye siddhatāpasāḥ /
vaseyuh pūjitā rājñā daivāpatpratikāriṇaḥ //*

"Therefore magicians and holy ascetics should live in the country, honoured by the king, as they remedy calamities caused by fate."

This religious aspect is not surprising in the Arthaśāstra which distinguishes calamities caused by fate from those due to wrong policy: *daivam* versus *mānuṣyam* (VII, 1, 2). Moreover, the XIV, book of the Arthaśāstra is dedicated to magic incantations and ceremonies to be applied when human efforts are not sufficient.

The whole of the VIIIth. Book of the Arthaśāstra (*vyasanādhikārikam*) is focused on different kinds of vices and political troubles. In VIII, 4 we find the 130th *prakaraṇa* called *pīḍanavargaḥ* (group of troubles). They are listed as providential troubles:

VIII, 4, 1: *daivapīḍanam - agnir udakaṃ vyādhir durbhikṣaṃ maraka iti* (trouble caused by fate is fire, floods, disease, famine, pestilence). These five calamities are discussed with the teachers who argue that fire is worse than floods, and disease worse than famine, but Kauṭilya is diametrically opposed. Then follows: *tena marako vyākhyātaḥ* (by this is explained "pestilence") that means,

the teachers take famine for worse, but Kauṭilya pestilence. This discussion is not out of place in the context of the VIIIth book, but as this list differs from the list in IV,3 we must conclude that the Arthaśāstra is a compilation which draws from many sources.

The later *Kāmandakīya Nītisāra* in XIV, 20 seems to follow this list of five though in other words due to the metrical form: *hutāsana* (or *agni*), *jala* (for *udaka*), *vyādhi*, *durbhikṣa*, and *maraka* are each a *daivaṃ vyasanam* to be overcome by *puruṣakāra* and *sāntikarman*. The *Kāmandakīya*, too, follows the Arthaśāstra in distinguishing between *daivaṃ vyasanam* and *mānuṣaṃ vyasanam*. In stanzas 63 and 64 of the XIVth *sarga* the *Kāmandakīya* lists the troubles of the kingdom (*rāṣṭravvyasana*) - they are partly divine calamities, partly caused by unjust rule, enemies and thieves:

ativṛṣṭir anāvṛṣṭiḥ śalabhāḥ mūṣakāḥ śukāḥ /
asatkaraś ca daṇḍaś ca paracakrāṇi taraskarāḥ // 63
rājānīkapriyotsargo marakavyādhipīḍanam /
paśūnāṃ maraṇaṃ rogo rāṣṭravvyasanam ucyate // 64

The first five calamities of this list (excessive rain, want of rain, locusts, rats and parrots) are identical with the *īti*-tradition (see below).

In the IXth book of the *Arthaśāstra* we find a third list of calamities caused by providence. After discussing various kinds of internal and external political troubles the book ends with an enumeration of seven calamities:

IX, 7, 72: *daivād agnir udakaṃ vyādhiḥ pramāro vidravo durbhikṣaṃ āsurī sṛṣṭir ity āpadaḥ* (originating from fate are the calamities fire, floods, disease, pestilence, panic (?), famine, demoniacal creation). The following *śloka* which concludes the IXth book lists only three calamities but can be regarded as a summary of the prose statement and is not necessarily a new list of calamities:

ativṛṣṭir avṛṣṭir vā sṛṣṭir yāsurī bhavet /
tasyām ātharvaṇaṃ karma siddhārambhāś ca siddhayaḥ // IX,

7, 74

When there is excessive rain or want of rain or demoniac creation, then the success lies in *Atharva* rites and in the activity of holy ascetics (*siddhas*). Kangle (Transl.) p. 500 note 82 comments

this passage: "Strictly speaking fire, floods etc. are *pīḍanas*, hardly *āpads*. The reference to them here is unnecessary". However, another list of calamities in *Nītivākyaṃṛta* 11,3 uses the term *āpad*, and the context of the preceding text of the *Arthaśāstra* suggested another reference to providential calamities. The seven *āpadaḥ* of *Arthaśāstra* IX, 7, 72 were obviously copied by the *Tantrākhyāyika* though it lists eight *pīḍanas*: *daiva*, *agni*, *udaka*, *vyādhi*, *maraka*, *viṣūcikā*, *durbhikṣāṇa*, *āsuri vṛṣṭi*. The latter is defined as excessive rain (*ativṛṣṭi*) or want of rain (*avṛṣṭi*). The *Tantrākhyāyika* misunderstood *daiva* as a special calamity and thus ends up with eight. Moreover, it reads *āsuri vṛṣṭi* instead of *āsuri sṛṣṭi*. According to Ganapati's commentary *āsuri sṛṣṭi* means rats, serpents spirits. The *Tantrākhyāyika* obviously did not understand this rare word and changed *sṛṣṭi* into *vṛṣṭi*.

Another term for calamity is found in the final stanza (Bharatavākya) of Kālidāsa drama *Mālavikāgnimitra*:

āśāsyam itivigamaprabhṛti prajānām

saṃpadyate na khalu goptari nāgnimitre

"When Agnimitra is the protector, the desire of the subjects beginning with the removal of calamities is certainly fulfilled".

Kāṭayavema comments on *īti*: *ativṛṣṭir anāvṛṣṭir śalabhā mūṣakāḥ śukāḥ/ pratyasannāś ca rājāṇaḥ ṣaḍ etā itayaḥ smṛtāḥ //*

"Excessive rain, want of rain, locusts, rats, parrots, and invading kings, these are known as six calamities". The *Śabdakalpadruma* quotes this stanza *sub voce* "*īti*" reading *khagāḥ* instead of *śukāḥ*. We came across this tradition already in the *Kāmandakīya* XIV, 63.

Kālidāsa's *Bharatavākya* (which is commented by Kāṭayavema) pinpoints the responsibility of the king. There will be no calamities when he fulfils the *rājadharmā*. *Mbh.* II, 30, 5 argues on these lines:

avarṣaṃ cātivarṣaṃ ca vyādhipāvakamūrchanam /

sarvam etat tadā nāsīd dharmanitye yudhiṣṭhire //

"Want of rain, excessive rain, disease, fire, premature death(?), all this did not exist, when Yudhiṣṭhira was constant in *dharma*". In *Mbh.* II, 5, 112 Nārada asks Yudhiṣṭhira whether he protects his kingdom from *agnibhaya* (danger of fire), *sarpavyālabhaya* (danger of snakes and wild beasts), and *rogarakṣobhaya* (danger of disease

and demons). These five *bhayas* constitute another list of calamities which introduces *mūrchana*. According to Kauṭ. I,9,9 the king appoints the *purohita* who is in charge of preventing or removing calamities: *purohitamāpadāṃ daivamānuṣiṅgām atharvabhīr upāyais ca pratikartāraṃ kurvīta* - "He should appoint a *purohita* to remedy divine and human calamity by *atharvanic* means". Here - as in Kauṭ. IV,3,37 and Kauṭ IX, 7, 84 the remedies against calamities are related to the *atharvanic* tradition. Many hymns of the *Atharvaveda* represent charms to cure a great variety of diseases or imprecations against demons but only few hymns are concerned with other calamities. In IV, 28 we find a prayer to Bhava and Sarva (two *mūrtis* of Rudra) for deliverance from calamity - the seven stanzas end with: *tau no muṇcatam aṃhasaḥ*. M.Bloomfield translates: "Deliver us from calamity!" R. T. H. Griffith renders: "Deliver us, ye twain, from grief and trouble". This shows that the translation of *aṃhas* is not unequivocal. Etymologically, it is related to Latin *angor* and *angustus*, and to German *Angst* (from old high German *angus-t*). In classical Sanskrit it is not used as a term for calamity. The charm VI, 106 protects from fire, charms VI, 56 and X,4 from snakes, IV, 3 from beasts of prey, but surprisingly there are no rain-charms or hymns which ward off floods or famine. We might assume that Kauṭilya's reference to *atharvanic* practices hints at the Indian magical tradition which has pre-aryan roots, and not only at the hymns of the *Artharvaveda* which represent just a small selection of charms and imprecations.

Though we should expect that the special task of the *purohita* in overcoming calamities was relevant for the *rājadharmas* sections of the *dharmaśāstras*, we find hardly any parallel. In *Viṣṇusmṛti* III, 68 it is the king himself who should appease divine calamities (here termed *upaghāta*) by propitiatory rites: *sāntisvastyanair daivopaghātān praśamayet*. In *Viṣṇusmṛti* III, 69 the king is expected to use his force against the *upaghātas* of the enemy's army: *paracakropaghātāṃś ca śastranīyatayā*, and according to the following *sūtra* III, 70 the king should appoint a *purohita*: *vedetihāsadharmaśāstrārthakuśalaṃ kulīnam avyāṅgaṃ tapasvināṃ purohitaṃ ca varayet*. However, by contrast to Kauṭ. I, 9, 9 the

duties of the *purohita* are not specified. This is surprising only at first sight. To be responsible for divine calamities is a heavy burden, and the *Viṣṇusmṛti* tends to exonerate the *purohita*, whereas the *Kautilīya Arthaśāstra* underlines the responsibility of the *purohita*. In the 11th chapter (called *purohitasamuddeśa*) of the *Nītivākyaṃṛta* (11, 1) we find a verbatim repetition of Kauṭ. I, 9, 9: *purohitam ... āpadāṃ daivamānuṣiṅgāṃ ca pratikartāraṃ kurvīta*, and consequently in 11, 3 we find an enumeration of fifteen calamities (which differs from any other list):

amānuṣo 'gnir avarṣam ativarṣam mārakaḥ durbhikṣaṃ sasyopaghātaḥ jantusargaḥ vyādhir bhūtapiśācaśākinīśarpavyālamūśakakṣobhāś cety āpadaḥ "Fire not caused by man, want of rain, excessive rain, pestilence, famine, loss of crop, abundant appearance of animals (?), disease, ghosts, demons, female demons, beasts of prey, rats and unrest(?) are the calamities". Again, we understand why *dharma* texts did not want to make the *purohita* responsible for all possible disasters and avoid to embark on such divine calamities. However, the *Atharvaveda* refers to charms which shall prevent or remove certain calamities.

Amazingly, earthquakes and violent storms are missing in all calamity lists. With regard to earthquakes one might argue that they are too sporadic on the Indian subcontinent. For most Indians it was most unlikely to become afflicted by this kind of calamity, which, however, was widely known from hearsay. The astrologer Varāhamihira pinpoints the signs for earthquakes in the XXXII chapter (*bhūkampalakṣaṇādhyāya* of his *Brhatsaṃhitā*). In XXXI, 1-7 he quotes different views on the causes of earthquakes. In stanza 1 some say by huge animals in the ocean, and others by the elephants which stand in the quarters of the sky and support the earth (*diggajas*), and in stanza 2 some say by wind colliding with wind, and others by an unforeseen power (*adīṣṭa*, which also means "destiny"). The editor Ramakrishna Bhat comments this stanza: "The opinions cited in this verse have a semblance of being scientific". Stanzas 3 - 7 recapitulate the myth that the earth was shaken by the winged mountains. The earth complains with Indra that the name *acalā* ("Immovable"), which he had given her, proved

wrong. Brahmā charges Indra with the task to chop off the wings of the mountains. Indra does it, but tells the earth that Wind, Fire, Indra himself and Varuṇa will shake her in the four parts of the day and night to reveal the fruits of good and bad (actions). This restriction may be due to the fact that earthquakes actually occurred and had to be accounted for. The oldest reference to earthquakes apparently is in *R̥gveda* II. 2 where Indra is praised for fixing the earth which often was quaking before. In the following stanzas Varāhamihira treats the effects of earthquakes which are different according to the specific stellar circle in which the earthquakes occur, for example, an earthquake presided by Varuṇa will lead to excessive rains (that is *ativṛṣṭi*, found in some calamity lists), and will destroy the Gonardas, Cedis, Kukuras, Kirātas and the people of Videha (XXXII, 20 - 22). In chapter XXXIX (*nirghātalakṣa-nādhyaṃ*), Varāhamihira discusses the calamity *nirghāta* (translated as "hurricane" by Ramakrishna Bhat). A *nirghāta* comes into being when wind struck by wind, whirls from the sky down on the earth. The damage is different according to the time of the day, for example, at sunset it kills judges, kings, rich men, soldiers, women, merchants and prostitutes.

According to the *Svapnacintāmaṇi* (ed. J. v. Negelein) dreaming of calamities is a bad omen, and dreaming of an earthquake (*bhūkampa*) forebodes death (II, 94).

The VIIth book of the Bhāratīya *Nāṭyaśāstra* discusses different emotions, their determinant factors, and their representation on the stage. Three of these emotions may be caused by calamities: *āvega* (agitation), *viṣāda* (despair), and *trāsa* (fright). VII, 63 lists portents (*utpāta*), wind rain, fire etc. as determinants of agitation. Despair (VII; 68) is due to *daivavyāpatti* (divine calamity) and other determinants. Fright (VII, 91) is triggered by lightning, meteor or storm (*nirghāta*). This word is translated as earthquake by Manmohan Ghosh, but is no proper synonym for *bhūkampa*. *Bhaya* "fear" (VII, 22), however, is not related to calamities. Like German *Angst* it expresses a more general emotion as it arises while roaming in a forest, or staying in an empty house, or hearing the hooting of owls.

All *śāstras* are normative treatises, which avoid references to historical facts. Actual cases of calamities must be inferred from works which report on actual events. This is not the topic of my paper, but I find it elucidating to quote a few examples from the *Rājataranigīṇī*. Under the reign of King Tuṅjīna the rice-crop in Kashmir was destroyed by heavy snowfall in the month Bhādrapada which lead to a terrible famine (II, 17 - 54). The king makes own transgressions responsible for this calamity, and also blames the wickedness of Time. Eventually, he sees no other remedy than burning himself. The queen prevents him from sacrificing himself. As she is of righteous conduct her intercession is successful, and the famine magically comes to an end. Though interwoven with legend, the description of this snow calamity in Kashmir may well be based on facts. In VII, 1219 floods are documented for 1100 A.C. which lead to a devastating famine. In the third decade of the 12th century (VIII, 1206 - 1235) conflagrations caused by warfare result in the starvation of many people. This famine and other afflictions are overcome by the abdication of the king and the coronation of the prince. These examples show that famine is not appearing spontaneously but actually the result of another calamity. It also comes clear that the responsibility of the king for calamities is deeply rooted in Indian history.

Transcending the historical dimension is the Hindu system of chronology. At the end of each *kalpa* there is a drought of hundred years, followed by a cosmic fire and by hundred years of rain. In each *caturyuga* (cycle of four ages) calamities begin to appear in the *dvāparayuga* and come to a climax in the *kaliyuga*. Thus we read on the *kaliyuga* in *Viṣṇupurāṇa* VI, 1, 25: *durbhikṣam eva satatam* ("famine is permanent") and in VI, 1, 38:

durbhikṣakarapīḍābhir atīva upadrutā janāḥ /

godhūmānnayavānnāḍhyān deśān yāsyanti duḥkhitāḥ //

"Oppressed excessively by famine and taxes, men will go in distress to regions which are abundant in wheat and barley." Migration to another region was recommended in Kauṭ. IV, 3, 19 as a remedy in case of famine, in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* this result of famine is a symptom of the *kaliyuga*. In this context we must come to the

conclusion that calamities are inevitable in the *kaliyuga*. However, there are also arguments to overcome this fatalism. In *Mbh.* XII, 70 several *śloka*s focus on the reign of the king: If he applies *daṇḍanīti* (science of politics) properly, he creates the *kṛtayuga*, if for three quarters the *tretāyuga*, if only half the *dvāparayuga*, and if he abandons it, he creates the *kaliyuga*. In *Manu* IX, 302, we read:

kalīḥ prasupto bhavati sa jāgrad dvāparam yugam /

karmasv abhyudyatas tretā vicarams tu kṛtaṃ yugam //

"Asleep he (the king) is the *kaliyuga*, awake, he is the *dvāparayuga*, ready to act, he is the *tretāyuga*, but active, he is the *kṛtayuga*".

The VIIIth chapter of the *Manusmṛti* deals with the settlement of law-cases and the responsibility of the king for the preservation of justice. In VIII, 21 we read that a kingdom perishes whose king looks on, while a *śūdra* decides law. The next stanza must be seen in this context:

yad rāṣṭraṃ śūdrabhūyiṣṭhaṃ nāstikāntam advijam /

vinaśyati āśu tat kṛtsnaṃ durbhikṣavyādhipīḍitam // (*Manu* VIII, 22)

"A kingdom where *śūdras* are in the majority (according to *Medhāthiti*: where *śūdras* mostly decide the law-cases), which is atheist and has no twice-born, soon totally perishes, oppressed by famine and disease". Here the calamities famine and disease are caused by conditions which are running contrary to the *dharma*. Ultimately, the king is responsible for these conditions and the resultant calamities.

Summary: We come across various lists of calamities in Sanskrit literature, and there are different terms for it: *āpad*, *īti*, *upaghāta*, *upanipāta*, (*daiva*)*pīḍana*, *mahābhaya*, *vyasana*. *Amara* gives *ḍimba* and *pravāsa* as synonyms for *īti*. In German we use the term *Naturkatastrophe* for providential calamities which are termed *daivam* in Sanskrit, by contrast to *mānuṣyam*. *Shamashastry* translates *upanipāta* in *Arthasāstra* IV, 3 with "national calamities". This implies the term "national" which does not hold true for the

past. "Disasters" include earthquakes as well as accidents caused by human failure.

The Kauṭīliya *Arthaśāstra* enumerates three (or even four) different lists which reveals the compilatory form of this treatise. The *Arthaśāstra* makes the *purohita* and specialists in atharvanic practices responsible for remedies against calamities. The *dharma* texts tend to exonerate the *purohita* and treat calamities only marginally, if at all. Yet, calamities are a problem of Rājadharmā. It is an inveterate commonplace of Indian tradition that the king was held responsible for the prosperity of the state, and calamities were regarded as the results of misgovernment. Even the late *Rājataranigīṇī* endorses this doctrine.